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SUBJECT An Interview With William Colby

MAURY POVICH: We are going to take a long look at a man who has been subjected to congressional investigation for the better part of a year now. He is William Colby, the former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, a man who left his office recently. Some say he was fired. He did not leave under the best of circumstances. However, he is proud of his tenure there, and he's also proud of what he did before the Congress. We're going to take probably the most intimate and professional look that you've seen of William Colby today. It is a lengthy interview, and I think that is only indicative of the importance of it. So I hope you can be with us today to get another view of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Lord knows how many critics we have had on this stage of ours over the past few years of the CIA, and they have had their shots at William Colby and his agency and his agents. And now we're going to give Mr. Colby an equal amount of time -- it's not going to be equal in terms of minutes, because if you add up all the minutes of the critics here on this set, it would not equal the amount of time that he got today. But I think his words are meaningful and they kind of even up the score, according to many.

Mr. Colby will be here in a moment. He's a rather controversial man. He's a man who came out of Princeton University, was a World War II hero in intelligence, dropping behind enemy lines on two occasions. And, in fact, there are many who feel that, especially when it came to Norway, he did much to save that country from the Germans during World War II, in what he did. He went back into intelligence in 1950, after staying out for a couple of years to get a law degree, and he went back into the CIA in 1950 and remained there for the next 25 years.

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William Colby is a man, I think, who is important to the American people at this moment, to judge for yourselves exactly what that agency has been doing and the charges that have been laid against it. And he reacts to all the charges, as well.

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POVICH: It is a fine and distinct pleasure that I have now to introduce our guest. It is rare that you would find that a man who directed the CIA and only a week or so out of office would come and talk about what he can talk about. And when I introduce William Colby, I must say to you that there are going to be things that I ask him that I am sure he is going to say, "I cannot comment on that." I only say that in preface because I am sure William Colby, who will be lecturing and who will be writing now, is a man who is going to stand fast by your pledge to the CIA when you entered that agency. And I think in your last news conference you said you would hold yourself to it, that you would not reveal anything that you felt was of national security matters.

WILLIAM COLBY: Right.

POVICH: Do you think the time will change, when a CIA Director and top-level CIA Deputy Directors will be freer to talk about their work?

COLBY: Well, I think they are freer today. I think the public testimony that we've had this past year and public speeches that I've given all around the country and my deputy has given in various parts of the country is an example of our effort to bring as much of intelligence into the open as we can. And I think that is the remarkable change that's occurred over this past very few years.

POVICH: Has there been too much? Some people, some of the critics, for instance, of the current investigations would say, "We have told too much. William Colby has told too much. We have lost the edge."

COLBY: Well, I think the answer to that is that the critics say that formerly we told too little, which may be partly right. And today I think that at the moment we are saying too much. I'm waiting for the pendulum to get back into the center.

POVICH: When you were subjected to the investigations by the Senate and the House, one of your first statements was, in a 30-page document that you presented before the Senate committee, "There were a few missteps by the agency." Would you hold yourself to that description, or would you like to change it now?

COLBY: No. I think that was dead right and I think that has been demonstrated by two of the -- or, three of the reports that have been published since that time: the Rockefeller Commission Report, the Senate Committee Report on Assassinations, and the Senate Committee Report on Chile.

I said that there were a few missteps in our 28-year history, and misdeeds -- I think I used also the phrase. The Rockefeller Commission Report says that the vast majority of our activity was perfectly proper and within our charter, that certain things we did were improper, some done at the specific direction of the President, some done because there was a gray area as to what should be done and what should not be done, and some done because of an excess of activity; and I think, honestly, at a period when there was some confusion as to whether we were doing the right thing for the government at all -- at the time.

The opening of the mail, for instance, began in 1953, opening mail to and from the Soviet Union, which was running spies in America. It was improper; we should not have done it, but I think the context of it [unintelligible].

As for the massive domestic intelligence activity, I think if you'll look through the reports, you'll find that we essentially had three agents who did things that they shouldn't have. Well, that's hardly a massive activity.

The Assassination Report: After six months of intensive investigation, the Senate committee discovered that we didn't assassinate anybody. There were two attempts made against two individuals -- there were two individuals that we tried to kill; neither of whom...

POVICH: Two heads of state.

COLBY: Not heads of state in both cases, but neither of whom died as a result. Now, that's hardly a grand program of assassination, such as we were alleged to be doing.

And with respect to Chile, I think it shows that our efforts there, with one exception, were aimed at supporting the democratic parties and forces in Chile.

POVICH: When you take a look at that record, coupled with the statement by the Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Frank Church, yesterday -- and by the way, I have talked to Senator Church on many occasions, and he has given you nothing but the utmost admiration for the way you and he have worked together...

COLBY: He's been very kind.

POVICH: ...in the last several months. But he says [that] if those missteps and misdeeds, if they were indeed that, there is enough there for criminal action, and he has called for a special prosecutor, maybe enlarging the Watergate special prosecutor's authority, to look into this.

That, to me, is criminal activity, the prospect of criminal activity, the possibility of it, and he wants it investigated. To me, that's more than misstep and misdeed.

COLBY: Well, I...

POVICH: Does he take a different view than you?

COLBY: No, I don't think so. He may think that there are things there that should be prosecuted. With my knowledge of the background, I have said on many occasions, and I still believe, that no jury would convict one of the individuals who was involved in one of these problems. I don't think a jury would convict the man who started opening the Soviet mail in 1953. It may be technically wrong, but I doubt that a jury would convict that individual. I think, similarly, in the other situations there are enough surrounding circumstances that no jury would, in the sense of an American jury reflecting American standards and the atmosphere and attitudes of our people, would not insist on some scapegoat of a CIA employee for some activity years ago which was quite within the consensus of American politics at the time.

POVICH: May I ask you: Do you think that a jury could convict a CIA Director for knowing about criminal activities done by agents and others, such as break-ins, as we hear about in Fairfax County in 1971, in which, allegedly, a CIA Director at the time knew about, and quite possibly he might be subject for prosecution?

COLBY: Again, I think the answer is basically no. I don't think a jury would convict a man who decided that he had to go to find out whether a former CIA employee, who was living with a Cuban at the time and asking some rather strange, probing questions, may have secured some classified documents from CIA. I think he was, indeed, following the specific dictates of the law, which call upon the Director to protect intelligence sources and methods.

Now, I think that probably, as we look at it now, we shouldn't have done it. But remember, that kind of a thing -- he didn't do it all by himself. We went to the police in the neighborhood and discussed with them how to do it.

POVICH: It always -- I would think that the most difficult problem to deal with is the clash between one's individual liberties in this country today and what we call the national

good or the national interest. That clash has existed throughout all of these investigations. Where will it end up? Which is the higher good?

COLBY: Well, I think the two can be put together very easily. I think that that is really what we have been doing in this past year. We have been bringing intelligence under the Constitution and laws of the United States. In most countries of the world, this doesn't exist. But I think we're looking at a new meaning of the initials CIA: Constitutional Intelligence for Americans.

I think that, yes, our intelligence system will abide by the laws. There are very few...

POVICH: Do you want them defined better, too, for the CIA? Would the CIA like to see those laws defined better for their...

COLBY: Certainly. I think the past tradition of intelligence was that it operated somewhere outside the law.

POVICH: Yes, I think most people had that...

COLBY: And that's no good in America, and we have finally resolved that in America.

POVICH: Can it, though?

COLBY: Certainly it can, within the United States.

POVICH: It can operate...

COLBY: Within the United States' laws. The United States has lots of secrets, lots of secret activities. We have a secret ballot box, we have the secret grand juries, we have secret relations between attorneys and clients; there are lots of secrets, and our democracy depends upon the respect for those secrets.

Intelligence has some secrets, and the safety of our democracy depends upon good intelligence. So I think we can resolve that without any trouble, and we can abide by the law, within the United States.

Obviously, in certain other countries of the world, espionage is illegal. But within the United States, I think we can follow the Constitution and laws of the United States. And it's a new era for intelligence.

POVICH: To conclude Frank Church's proposals for a special prosecutor, you then would reject that as an answer to this.

COLBY: Well, I think the ordinary Department of Justice procedures are adequate to look into whether any prosecutions should be launched. And, as you know, the Department of Justice is looking into these various things, and they will come out with some conclusion that will either stand up as a valid conclusion or will be criticized at the time.

I don't see any need for a special prosecutor, because I really resist the idea of making CIA employees scapegoats for a revision of our national values of the last 20 years.

POVICH: And you think there are attempts by some to do that?

COLBY: There are some that I think would do so.

POVICH: When -- there are many, many reports now of so-called leaks out of the House committee. Now, you've testified before the Senate committee and you've testified before the House committee. At any time before the House committee, were you somewhat reluctant to tell all that you knew, because of the atmosphere and the character of that committee?

COLBY: Well, certainly. There were a number of times I quite frankly said that there were certain things that were highly sensitive, highly secret, that I really didn't want to give the details, that I would give a general description. And that met with the acceptance by the committee at the time. I think, however, we did provide a vast number of details to the House committee, and a considerable number of these have actually come to public attention.

POVICH: So what you're saying is you frankly told Frank Church more than you told Otis Pike and his committee.

COLBY: Oh, no. No, I approached them both about the same.

POVICH: You did?

COLBY: Yes. Yes. The relationship with the two was one in which we were endeavoring to show the total picture of intelligence and endeavoring to respond to their inquiries, and at the same time protect the identities of people who worked with us, either foreigners or Americans, protect some of the foreign intelligence services that collaborate with us, protect some of the technical systems and means that we have to determine intelligence; and we obviously tried to limit the exposure of some of those sensitive details, at the same time giving an overall picture of intelligence and what it's all about and how it works.

POVICH: When the House committee was close to publishing

its report, a report which would have revealed some rather embarrassing secrets that this country had and the activities of the CIA, what would you have thought of if -- and just by means of addendum, there were published reports of the report in various publications -- but if the House committee had published the report, what would your reaction have been?

COLBY: Well, I think that there are several points here. First, I think that the -- we did not object to criticism. We have never objected to criticism. Some of our own employees have requested permission to publish criticism of the agency, and that's no problem; we let that go.

Secondly, we do object to the publication of secrets, and secrets and the official admission of certain activities which, in international relations, cannot be officially admitted by a government, that it conducts in some other area, or you create enormous diplomatic problems around the world. So we object to that kind of a disclosure.

But lastly, of course, we felt that the report was biased and tendentious. That we could answer by our own statements against those points, but that would be something we would answer. I thought the report was highly unfair and gave a very biased picture of American intelligence as a whole, at least the draft I saw. And I think that is a disservice...

POVICH: It criticized not necessarily your activities, but the way you carried them out. I mean it was highly critical, was it not, of many of the intelligence activities that were quite proper? I mean it went back -- that report went back and criticized you for the '73 Israeli war, the Cyprus problem, many of the crucial trouble spots of the world and our intelligence response to it.

Is that what you're talking [about] when you said it was unfair?

COLBY: Well, almost everything included in that report, and in the investigations of this year, for that matter, have not been found by some brilliant investigation. They have been the repetition of some internal reports, internal self-criticism that intelligence made of itself.

POVICH: Are you saying that the investigations in the Congress have turned up nothing that the CIA did not give to the committees?

COLBY: Practically nothing. I think if you will read the report I gave to the President a little over a year ago, compare that with the Rockefeller Report, compare it with any other evidence that's come to light in any of the other committees, you don't find anything very different; you find a few additional cases

of one type of activity or another, but you don't find any new activity.

The criticism of the Arab-Israeli war, the criticism of the Vietnam reporting, things of that nature, they all came out of our own reporting and our own criticisms.

POVICH: Would you have been that candid and honest with the President if the Congress had not been a prod in this matter?

COLBY: With the President? Certainly. He has access to everything.

POVICH: Could you have said -- could you have been honest and candid about the performance of the CIA during the Arab-Israeli war and Cyprus and Vietnam and other places?

COLBY: We had been. We had written the examinations and the critiques and we had distributed those critiques to the National Security Council Intelligence Committee. We had already provided those to the proper channels for criticism.

POVICH: We're going to pause and come back and continue our discussion with William Colby.

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POVICH: We're talking with William Colby, who has resigned as CIA Director after 25 years of intelligence work at the CIA, and before that, the World War II OS -- the quite famous OSS intelligence group.

There are many issues I want to cover, but I want to see if I can get through some of them.

A fellow named Tim Butz has sat in your seat and talked about publishing lists of CIA agents. He feels he is doing no harm, but a service to the American people by publishing the names and addresses of station chiefs and other CIA employees. There are many, some from the CIA in the past, who have said that that was responsible for the death of one Richard Welch and, who knows, of the harassment and problems for other agents.

What's your view of that and what's your view of Tim Butz and the other people of this magazine called Counter-Spy and other publications around the world that are publishing names?

COLBY: Well, I don't think you can say that any one particular publication was the source of, for instance, Mr. Welch's death. But certainly the campaign of exposing CIA people has been one which has been carried on by foreigners, [unintelligible] understanding. There have been books published abroad by -- which we

believe were supported by hostile intelligence services. We have had articles about our people in the foreign press. This is part of the risk of the game. When intelligence officers serve overseas, they do things which are dangerous, which call them -- cause them to attract attention, perhaps; and they have to keep as low a profile as possible and not identify themselves as intelligence personnel, or they'll be followed and they'll be watched for every step they take and everybody they see, and they won't be able to do their job very well.

So, that is part of it, with respect to foreigners.

I can't conceive why an American would do that. An American -- I can understand an American objecting to CIA -- fine. Go up to Congress, appeal, complain about it, and all the rest. That's no problem. But to have an American exposing a fellow American to death or danger, I really don't understand this. And to say that, "Well, it can be found out anyway by careful looking at the records and so forth," that's not a justification. I sure I could find out something about a fellow American, but I would think it quite reprehensible for me to expose him to potential death by republishing what could be found out somewhere else and thereby assisting some terrorist to locate, to identify, and to stimulate the terrorists to take action against him.

POVICH: What have you done -- you, meaning the agency -- in recent months, when various lists were published in various publications, both foreign and domestic? I mean what have the orders been from your agency?

COLBY: Well, in some circumstances we have changed people, we have moved people out of parts of the world where they were exposed. In other situations we have arranged for special protection for some of our people when they've had to stay in order to do their job in a certain area.

POVICH: Have you taken the matter to the embassies, as I think you said...

COLBY: In certain situations, yes, we have. We've taken them out of certain places because they were exposed in that area. We also have, in some cases, asked them to stand down on their contacts and their relationships, so that we're not collecting the intelligence that we were previously collecting. There are various ways in which we try to protect our people and our operations and the people they deal with, following one of these exposures. And I just don't understand why an American would want to do this to his own government, to his own fellow Americans. I can understand a foreigner doing it, who is hostile to our country and to our government. But if an American wants to change CIA and the intelligence business, there are lots of vehicles for him to do so without endangering a fellow American.

POVICH: When you -- there was another gentleman who sat here not too long ago named Sam Jaffe, a former ABC/CBSs correspondent. With him was a huge file that he procured from the Freedom of Information Act about his relationship between the FBI and the CIA. And he said that he was an unabashed informant to the CIA and FBI of his activities and contacts with people in foreign countries. He said there was a list of between 40 and 200 names of journalists who had similar contacts, which he said, both paid and unpaid. The names he named were the biggest in my business.

What relationship has there been between the CIA and journalists? Because you yourself admitted that you were a source, way back in 1973, of a story about contacts between journalists and the CIA. What is the truth?

COLBY: Well, the fact of CIA's relationship with journalism is very easy to explain. Journalists live in foreign countries; CIA officers live in foreign countries. There's a certain amount of informal contact between them. A patriotic journalist may say something to an ambassador, he may say something to a CIA man. No operational relationship, no money passes; just the relationship of two Americans in a foreign country. That's one situation.

The other situation is that CIA may have some people abroad pretending to be something else and actually doing some intelligence work for us.

POVICH: Posing as journalists.

COLBY: Now, in the past, as I think I've testified, there were some who were fulltime staff members of general circulation media. In 1973 I said that those would be phased out, and they have been phased out since that time. So there are no fulltime staff members of general circulation media. There are still stringers, free-lancers, people of this nature who deal with a people as independent contractors. And when an editor receives the copy from such a stringer, he knows he's getting something submitted from the outside, and he can judge the copy on its own value, as to what it amounts to. He knows that the man may be working for someone else, some other news outfit, somebody else, anyone else. And so, consequently, I feel that that's an area that we can continue to use.

We do, however, take particular pains to insure that no copy which is submitted to an American journal is directed by CIA. The individual writes his own copy with his own views and submits them as himself. We have very strong rules against any attempt to determine what should appear in the American press.

POVICH: You of course could understand that any jour-

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nalist who is worth anything would see a situation like that in tones of something that is absolutely reprehensible, abhorrent to our ethics, that anyone who is a journalist, who is observing a situation, who is doing his job, to be a contact, then, with a government agency defeats all the purpose of being a journalist.

COLBY: No, I don't think so at all. I don't think so at all. I think that -- certainly, that's certainly not true of most of the countries of the world, and the journalists in most other countries...

POVICH: But we're not -- you know as well as I do, Mr. Colby, in most countries in the world you wouldn't be sitting here, you wouldn't have been testifying for the last year-and-a-half. I mean if we are the best of the democracies in the world...

COLBY: Yes, but we're talking about journalism; we're talking about the business of journalism and whether journalism...

POVICH: Which is the pillar and fiber of this country, wouldn't you not say? A free journalism in this country...

COLBY: There are lots of pillars and fibers...

POVICH: Well, it's got to be...

COLBY: ...and I'd just put journalism as one of them, but I wouldn't put it as the only one or even the main one.

POVICH: It could be top priority among some.

COLBY: Well, I think the secret ballot is about as important as any other.

But the fact is that the journalist can indeed submit copy to a journal and can submit copy to another journals. He doesn't have any problem in submitting copy to two or three different journals. And if he submits copy to CIA and submits copy to another journal, provided he's not a staff member -- I agree on that. I do not believe that an editor should be receiving material from a man that he thinks is working for him and to have that man have another relationship, and that's why we terminated those.

But as for the independent American living abroad, I don't see why there's anything reprehensible about him submitting an article to a journal and submitting that information to CIA. There's nothing inconsistent with that at all, that he's selling his copy to two different places.

POVICH: I would say that it would be highly inconsistent,

and most people in my profession, I think, would agree with me, although I can understand the case.

COLBY: You're limiting it to the American journalist profession, because in every other country of the world, including some of the great democracies, I know very well that they don't even use the limit that I use. They have fulltime staff members of some of their most prestigious journals acting for their intelligence services.

POVICH: I would say to you that if that was the truth, if that was the case, and I'm sure it is, that they have no respect from the journalists in this country.

COLBY: I beg your pardon. A lot of them -- and I happen to know a few of them -- are respected by the journalists in this country for the quality of their reporting and the quality of their information.

POVICH: Even though they are in fact informants to their own countries' intelligence agencies?

COLBY: Yes. And the quality of their product is such that they do get a great deal of respect.

POVICH: On this supposed list, which I don't even know if you've ever heard of it...

COLBY: I've never heard of the list.

POVICH: You've never heard of the list.

COLBY: I can't identify that at...

POVICH: Do you know of any national stature journalists, journalists of national stature...

COLBY: No.

POVICH: ...who have helped you?

COLBY: No, no. Other than the first category I mentioned, which is the journalist who talks in the embassy with the members of the official family.

POVICH: In the course of his job.

COLBY: In the course of his job, not in any way responding to the government's position...

POVICH: But you don't know of any names that might be household names in this country of people.

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COLBY: No, I do not.

POVICH: Let me move on to some other areas. There are -- and we mentioned before the question of leaks coming out of congressional committees. You have admitted that you were in fact the source of one story about the CIA involving journalists in '73.

COLBY: Well, I think what I was doing on that -- I don't think that was a leak.

POVICH: You leaked a story.

COLBY: No. A pitcher pours water out the top. You can refill the pitcher. You're conscious of what you're letting go and you're letting go what can be let go. A leak is something that pulls the content out of the pitcher and it can't be refilled. That's a different subject. Pouring information out the top we do all the time. We do have a number of journalists who come to CIA regularly to get briefings on the world and what it looks like and what the situation in various parts of the world are, and I feel that that is important, and we do use information and provide that to them. We don't put the CIA stamp on it, but on the other hand, we provide the information because we think that it's important in our society that our people and our journalists be as well informed as possible, while we protect the sources from which we get the information.

That particular situation came as a result of a question as to whether we ever had any relationships with journalists, in a discussion with the editorial board of a couple of journals. And I felt it important to clarify to them exactly the extent of what our relationships were, in order to retain a relationship of good faith with the journals. I didn't leak anything. I didn't expose anything. I didn't expose any names in the process. I merely told a little bit about the intelligence business and the limits of what it does and should do and should not do, as I think I've been trying to do in my public speeches and in my public testimony, of similarly explaining the true nature of modern American intelligence, that it's not like the old intelligence, that it's technological, that it's analytical, and so forth.

POVICH: And these leaks...

COLBY: That's not a leak.

POVICH: These leaks that have come out of the committee, some are saying, are a smokescreen, the criticism of the committee because of the leaks are a smokescreen -- this is a smokescreen for, indeed the most important matter at hand, and that is the question of covert activities by the intelligence community.

COLBY: Well, I don't think it's a smokescreen. I think...

POVICH: It's not an attempt to besmirch the reputation of the congressional committees.

COLBY: No, I flatly deny that. No. Of all the people that would be leaking, I don't think you can say that we in CIA want to. We're trying to protect these secrets. That's the whole function that we're engaged in, is trying to protect them. And, no, I can guaranty you that the leaks didn't come out of any plan like that, to denounce the committees for exposure.

POVICH: We're going to pause and come back and continue with William Colby in a moment.

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POVICH: For those of you who do not know the background of William Colby, he is a graduate of Princeton University. In the OSS in World War II -- and his fellow intelligence agents at the time have told me that no one had more courage than William Colby, and Bill Colby, and what he did behind the lines, parachuting in France and in Norway during World War II is unequalled in the annals of the OSS. He would modestly deny all that, of course. I'm sure you would feel that...

[Confusion of voices]

POVICH: There were many other people in the OSS who were as brave as you were. However, I wonder what happens to people who live that kind of life, romantic in a kind of grotesque way -- parachuting at night behind the lines -- how do you ever relive things like that, or do you try not to? What happens to great soldiers of -- old soldiers of fortune, etcetera, etcetera?

COLBY: Well, I think that depends on the individual. Some people have a great experience and spend the rest of their life reliving it. I have always tried to look ahead and look at the excitement of the future, rather than the excitement of the past. And I think that there is plenty of excitement on into the future ahead of all of us in these coming years, and I think that can take all your attention, and you really don't have to look to the past.

POVICH: There are some critics of CIA who would say that the only change at that agency that has occurred since the investigations have begun is the replacement of William Colby, that William Colby was the victim, William Colby was the fall guy, and that Secretary of State Kissinger and Vice President Rockefeller told the President long ago to get rid of him because he came clean, he told too much.

How do you respond to those characteristics of you?

COLBY: Well, I don't think that there's any personal feeling about this. I think that the series of investigations went on and that it would be -- as I've said for many months, that it would be quite appropriate to put a new face on the head of CIA at an appropriate time during the -- after the investigations had essentially run their course, in order to show that a new era was starting and that the investigation period was over and that we could go on and approach and face the problems of intelligence in the future.

POVICH: Did the President know exactly what you were going to do before those committees?

COLBY: Oh, I think in general, it was clear...

POVICH: In other words, is there room for the criticism that you told too much to those committees and that you embarrassed the Administration because of it?

COLBY: I don't know whether there's room for it, but I don't think that it embarrasses this Administration, because President Ford has always been very straight about intelligence remaining within its proper boundaries. He has supported intelligence on many occasions, the importance of it, in public speeches. And I don't think that it embarrasses the Administration in any degree.

Obviously, there are some things that I told that I would have wished myself would have remained untold. But the fact is that they had to be told at the time in order to respond to the quite natural requirement of the Congress and the people for knowledge of what intelligence did over the years.

POVICH: And you don't feel badly about the role you have played in the last year-and-a-half or so.

COLBY: No, I don't feel badly. I know -- I certainly had to learn how to handle television and things like that in what might be called on-the-job training, and I'm sure I put my foot in my mouth a few times in that process. In the grand lines of it, I would do it pretty much the same way I did it before, because I think it was important to get the past out of the way and move to the future.

I'm afraid I did not quite appreciate the degree of sensationalism that would be applied to some of the few and far incidents that I mentioned. I think that this comes from a difference in approach. One newsman said that he thought that these kinds of events were the tip of an iceberg and that, consequently, there was a much bigger iceberg...

POVICH: Yes, I've heard that.

COLBY: ...underneath. But the fact is that the reports indicate that there's no iceberg at all, that the comparison is really more of the blind man and the elephant, and each blind man sees another piece of the elephant and generalizes it into the whole. But nobody -- the trouble is that nobody had a good perception of the whole picture of intelligence. And so the individual incidents were blown out of proportion and gave, in my opinion, a totally false overall picture of intelligence; and there was certainly no iceberg there.

POVICH: Over the years, I have had people on this show talking about Vietnam. And if we can go back to the Vietnam of the '60s -- so many times, critics of Vietnam would say there is a murderer in Vietnam and his name is William Colby, because he was at the top of a program called the Phoenix Program, in which no more torturous, no more nefarious, no more wicked program could there have been than the Phoenix Program, that villagers were murdered and tortured under the guise of infiltration of the Viet Cong cadres.

What's your response to that, because I've been hearing that line for many, many years?

COLBY: And I've been testifying publicly to the contrary for many, many years; starting in 1970, I testified for one whole week in public session to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on this subject, and I think I made it clear then and I have continued to make it clear that Phoenix was only one part of an overall pacification program which was designed to meet a nasty, mean guerrilla war at the village level, that the Communists were running a terror campaign, a campaign of repression of the villagers to force them to support the Communists, that the answer to that was not a matter of chasing the Communists away; the answer to that, basically, was a matter of encouraging and supporting the villagers. That was done through, mainly, providing the villagers with arms. And that government that the people say was so oppressive is the government that gave 500,000 weapons to its own people to use on a part-time basis, not to soldiers, not to people who were recruited and paid or anything, but to unpaid volunteers to defend their villages; 500,000 weapons they gave to those people, and they did defend their villages. They supported local elections of local village chiefs and so forth.

And as a part of this whole program, there was an effort to identify who the Communist apparatus was within the villages. This initially was a very badly managed program, and Phoenix was an attempt to put rules and structure onto such a program, to insist that there be true evidence of somebody's denunciation as a Communist, to set limits to the time they could be held without proceedings, to set limits on the way they would be interrogated, to reject the ability of the local people to chase followers instead of focusing on leaders.

POVICH: So you, in effect...

COLBY: And that was a program that essentially tried to improve the way the government, if not the Communists, conducted that war in the villages.

POVICH: And you were proud of that...

COLBY: And I think it did achieve that, in great part. I have admitted and said on a number of occasions that, yes, there were abuses; there are abuses that take place in wars. There weren't very many, and we had rules against them. We had very strict rules for the Americans there that they would not in any way engage in any of that activity and that they would report to me any activity of that sort that they found. And I received those reports and I went to the Vietnamese Government and I secured changes as a result.

So, I think that the program has been grossly misunderstood, grossly misstated, not by people who were in it, but by people who were outside of it.

POVICH: I thank you very much for coming here today, William Colby. You're going to be writing and you're going to be speaking. And now that you are free of your job, I am sure you are going to be sitting and defending yourself for a long time. You've done it eloquently, by the way, today. I thank you very much.

COLBY: Thank you very much.